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# THE SOUTH, 1820-1830

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REPRINTED FROM THE

*American Historical Review*

VOL. XI., NO. 3

APRIL, 1906

F213  
T95

or  
Amer. Hist. Rev.

## THE SOUTH, 1820-1830

IN the years between 1820 and 1830 no section underwent more far-reaching changes than did the South Atlantic group of states, made up of Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Then it was that the South learned the full significance of the westward spread of the cotton-plant.<sup>1</sup>

The invention of the cotton-gin by Eli Whitney<sup>2</sup> in 1793 made possible the profitable cultivation of the short-staple variety of cotton. Before this the labor of taking the seeds by hand from this variety, the only one suited to production in the uplands, had prevented its use; thereafter it was only a question of time when the cotton area, no longer limited to the tide-water region, would extend to the interior, carrying slavery with it. This invention came at an opportune time. Already the inventions of Arkwright, Hargreaves, and Cartwright had worked a revolution in the textile industries of England, by means of the spinning-jenny, the power-loom, and the factory system, furnishing machinery for the manufacture of cotton beyond the world's supply.<sup>3</sup>

Under the stimulus of this demand for cotton, year by year the area of slavery extended toward the west. In the twenties many of the southern counties of Virginia were attempting its cultivation<sup>4</sup>; interior counties of North Carolina were combining cotton culture with their old industries; in South Carolina the area of cotton and slavery had extended up the rivers well beyond the middle of the state<sup>5</sup>; while in Georgia the cotton-planters, so long restrained by the Indian line, broke through the barriers and spread over the newly-ceded lands.

<sup>1</sup> This article is based upon a chapter from the author's forthcoming *Rise of the New West*, American Nation Series.

<sup>2</sup> AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW, III. 99.

<sup>3</sup> M. B. Hammond, *The Cotton Industry*, part I. (American Economic Association, 1897), chaps. 1. and 11.; Harry Hammond, "Culture of Cotton," in *The Cotton Plant* (United States Department of Agriculture, 1896); Ernst von Halle, *Baumwollproduktion*, part I., in *Schmoller's Staats- und Socialwissenschaftliche Forschungen*, Band XV., part 1. (1897).

<sup>4</sup> *Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention of 1829-1830* (Richmond, 1830), pp. 333, 336; Joseph Martin, *Gazetteer of Virginia and the District of Columbia* (Charlottesville, 1835), 99.

<sup>5</sup> William A. Schaper, "Sectionalism and Representation in South Carolina" (*Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1900*, I.), 387-393.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich B. Phillips, "Georgia and State Rights" (*Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1901*, II.), 140 (map).

The table exhibiting the progress of the cotton crop printed in the January number of the REVIEW<sup>1</sup> shows the rapidity with which this plant increased.

Tide-water South Carolina and Georgia produced practically all of the cotton crop in 1791, and the total was but two million pounds. By 1821 the South Atlantic states produced one hundred and seventeen million pounds; and five years later, one hundred and eighty millions. But how rapidly in these five years the Southwest gained on the older section is shown by its total of over one hundred and fifty millions. What had occurred was a repeated westward movement: the cotton-plant first spread from the sea-coast to the uplands, and then, by the beginning of our period, advanced to the Gulf Plains, until that region achieved supremacy in its production.

How deeply the section was interested in this crop, and how influential it was in the commerce of the United States, appears from the fact that in 1820 the domestic exports of South Carolina and Georgia had amounted to \$15,215,000, while the value of the domestic exports for all the rest of the United States was \$36,468,000.<sup>2</sup> This, however, inadequately represents the value of the exports from these two cotton states, because a large fraction of the cotton was carried by the coastwise trade to northern ports, and appeared in their shipments. Senator William Smith of South Carolina estimated that in 1818 the real exports of South Carolina and Georgia amounted to "more than half as much as that of the other states of the Union, including the vast and fertile valley of the Mississippi".<sup>3</sup>

Never in history, perhaps, was an economic force more influential upon the life of a people. As the production of cotton increased, the price fell, and the Seaboard South, feeling the competition of the virgin soils of the Southwest, saw in the protective tariff for the development of Northern manufactures the real source of her distress. The price of cotton was in these years a barometer of Southern prosperity and of Southern discontent.

<sup>1</sup> AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW, XI. 318; the totals given in this paper are based on the figures of McGregor, instead of on those of the table taken from *De Bow's Review*.

<sup>2</sup> Pitkin, *Statistical View* (edition of 1835), 57.

<sup>3</sup> Speech in the United States Senate, April 11, 1828.

<sup>4</sup> M. B. Hammond, *The Cotton Industry*, part I., appendix 1, gives the average New York prices of middling upland cotton. See also E. J. Donnell, *Chronological and Statistical History of Cotton* (1872), and James L. Watkins, *Production and Price of Cotton for One Hundred Years* (United States Department of Agriculture, 1895).

Even more important than the effect of cotton production upon the prosperity of the South was its effect upon her social system. This economic transformation resuscitated slavery from a moribund condition to a vigorous and aggressive life. Slowly Virginia and North Carolina came to realize that the burden and expense of slavery, as the labor system for their outworn tobacco-fields and corn-fields, was partly counteracted by the demand for their surplus negroes in the cotton-fields of their more southern neighbors. When the Lower South accepted the system as the basis of its prosperity and its society, the tendency in the states of the Upper South to look upon the institution as a heritage to be reluctantly and apologetically accepted grew fainter.<sup>1</sup> The efforts to find some mode of removing the negro from their midst came slowly to an end, and they adjusted themselves to slavery as a permanent system. Meanwhile South Carolina and Georgia found in the institution the source of their economic well-being, and hotly challenged the right of other sections to speak ill of it or meddle with it in any way lest their domestic security be endangered.

When the South became fully conscious that slavery set the section apart from the rest of the nation, when it saw in protection to manufactures and the construction of a system of internal improvements the efforts of other sections to deprive the cotton states of their profits for the promotion of an industrial development in which they did not share, deep discontent prevailed. With but one intermission from the days of Washington to those of Monroe, Virginia planters had ruled the nation. But now, at the same time that power within the section passed from the hands of Virginia to those of South Carolina, the aggressive leader of the Cotton Kingdom, the South found itself a threatened and minority section. When it realized this, it denied the right of the majority to rule, and proceeded to elaborate a system of minority rights as a protection against the forces of national development, believing that these forces threatened the foundations of the prosperity and even the social safety of the South.<sup>2</sup>

From the middle of the eighteenth century the seaboard planters had been learning the lesson of control by a fraction of the population. The South was by no means a unified region in its physiography. The Blue Ridge cut off the low country of Virginia from the Shenandoah Valley, and beyond this valley the Alleghenies sepa-

<sup>1</sup> Jefferson, *Writings* (Ford's edition), X, 173, 178; *Niles' Register*, XVII, 363; J. S. Bassett, *Anti-slavery Leaders of North Carolina*, in Johns Hopkins University Studies, XVI.

<sup>2</sup> The most effective statements of this attitude are: John Taylor, *New Views of the Constitution* (Washington, 1823), 261; and Brutus [R. J. Turnbull], *The Crisis* (Charleston, 1827).

rated the rest of the state from those counties which we now know as West Virginia. By the time of the Revolution, in the Carolinas and Georgia a belt of pine barrens, skirting the "fall line" from fifty to one hundred miles from the coast, divided the region of tide-water planters from the small farmers of the up-country. This interior population entered the region in the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. Scotch-Irishmen and Germans passed down the Great Valley from Pennsylvania into Virginia, and through the gaps in the Blue Ridge out to the Piedmont region of the Carolinas, while contemporaneously other streams from Charleston had advanced to meet them. Thus at the close of the eighteenth century the South was divided into two contrasted types of civilization. On the one side were the planters, raising their staple crops of tobacco, rice, and indigo, together with some cultivation of the cereals. To this region belonged the slaves. On the other side was the area of small farmers, raising livestock, wheat, and corn under the same conditions of pioneer farming as characterized the interior of Pennsylvania.

This interior area, made up of the Great Valley and the Piedmont of the South, is a neglected region. It may be named the Old West, for here first developed the conditions characteristic of the West, and the social, economic, and political antagonisms between the coast and the interior. The historians of the separate Southern states appreciate this differentiation in the states of which they write; but the real significance of the region lies in the fact that it was an interstate area, with a striking homogeneity and community of interest, in opposition to the East.

From the period of the so-called War of the Regulation in 1771 down to the third decade of the nineteenth century there was a persistent struggle between the planters of the coast (who controlled the wealth of the region) and the free farmers of the interior. The tide-water counties retained the political power which they already possessed before this tide of settlement flowed into the back-country. Refusing to reapportion the legislature on the basis of numbers, they protected their slaves and their wealth against the dangers of a democracy that was interested in internal improvements and capable of imposing a tax upon slave property in order to promote its own ends.<sup>1</sup> In Virginia in 1825, for example, the

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention, 1829-1830*; Johns Hopkins University Studies, XIV. 277, 280, 289; XVI. 267-269; XVII. 324-325; *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1894*, pp. 144 *et seqq.*; *ibid.*, 1900, I. 277, 435; *ibid.*, 1901, II. 87-89, 104-106; *Elliot's Debates*, IV. 288, 296-299, 305, 309, 312; *Jefferson, Writings* (Ford's edition), III. 222; *John P. Branch Historical Papers*, II. 100.



western men complained that twenty counties in the upper country, with over two hundred and twenty thousand white inhabitants, had no more weight in the government than twenty counties on tide-water, containing only about fifty thousand; that the six smallest counties in the state, compared with the six largest, enjoyed nearly ten times as much political power.<sup>1</sup> To the gentlemen planters of the seaboard the idea of falling under the control of the interior farmers of the South seemed intolerable. It was only as slavery spread into the interior, with the cultivation of cotton, that the lowlands began to yield, and to permit an increased power in the legislatures to the sections most nearly assimilated to the seaboard type. South Carolina achieved this end in 1808 by the plan of giving to the seaboard the control of one house, while the interior held the other; but it is to be noted that this concession was not made until slavery had pushed so far up the river-courses that the reapportionment preserved the control in the hands of slaveholding counties.<sup>2</sup> A similar course was followed by Virginia in the convention of 1829-1830, when after a long struggle a compromise was adopted by which the balance of power in the state legislature was transferred to the counties of the Piedmont and the Valley.<sup>3</sup> Here slaveholding had progressed so far that the interest of those counties was affiliated rather with the coast than with the trans-Allegheny country. West Virginia remained a discontented area until her independent statehood in the days of the Civil War. These transmontane counties of Virginia were in their political activity during our period rather to be reckoned with the West than with the South.

Thus the southern seaboard had experienced the need of protecting the interests of its slaveholding planters against the free democracy of the interior, and had learned how to safeguard the minority within the section itself. This experience was now to serve the South when, having advanced toward unity by the spread of slavery into the interior, it found itself as a section in the same relation to the Union as a whole which the slaveholding tide-water area had held toward the more populous up-country of the South itself.

The unification of the section is one of the most important features of the period. Not only had the South been divided into opposing areas, as we have seen, but even its population was far from homogeneous. By the time of this decade, however, English,

<sup>1</sup> *Alexandria Herald*, June 10 and 13, 1825.

<sup>2</sup> Calhoun, *Works*, I, 401-406; Schaper, "Sectionalism and Representation in South Carolina," 434-437.

<sup>3</sup> *Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention, 1829-1830*; J. A. C. Chandler, *Representation in Virginia*, Johns Hopkins University Studies, XIV, 286-298.

French Huguenots, Scotch-Irish, and Germans had become assimilated into one people; and the negroes, who by the close of the decade numbered over a million and a half in a white population of less than two millions, were diffusing themselves throughout the section. Contemporaneously the pioneer farming type of the interior was undergoing replacement by the planter type. This was largely a change in economic and social life, rather than a replacement of people.

As cotton-planting and slaveholding advanced into the interior counties of the old southern states, the free farmers were obliged either to change to the plantation economy and purchase slaves, or to sell their lands and migrate. Large numbers of them, particularly in the Carolinas, were Quakers or Baptists, whose religious scruples combined with their agricultural habits to make this change obnoxious. This upland country, too distant from the seashore to permit a satisfactory market, had been a hive from which pioneers had passed into Kentucky and Tennessee, until those states became populous commonwealths. Now the exodus was increased by this later colonization.<sup>1</sup> The Ohio was crossed, the Missouri ascended, and the streams that flowed to the Gulf were followed by movers away from the regions that were undergoing this social and economic reconstruction. This industrial revolution was effective in different degrees in the different states. Comparatively few of Virginia's slaves, which by 1830 numbered nearly half a million (or about forty per cent. of the population), were found in her trans-Allegheny counties, but the Shenandoah Valley was receiving slaves and changing to the plantation type. In North Carolina the slave population of nearly two hundred and fifty thousand (over thirty-five per cent. of the population) at the same date had spread well into the interior, but cotton did not achieve the position there which it held farther south. The interior farmers worked small farms of wheat and corn, laboring side by side with their negro slaves in the fields.<sup>2</sup> South Carolina had over three hundred thousand slaves, more than a majority of her population; and the black belt had extended to the interior. Georgia's slaves, amounting to over two hundred thousand, some-

<sup>1</sup> Turner, "The Colonization of the West", in *AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW*, XI. 307-309, 316-317; J. S. Bassett, *Anti-slavery Leaders of North Carolina*, Johns Hopkins University Studies, XVI. 267-271; D. A. Tompkins, *History of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina* (Charlotte, N. C., 1903), I. 99, 117; S. A. [O']Ferrall, *Ramble through the United States* (London, 1832), 167; *History of McLean County, Illinois* (Chicago, 1879), 329; *Personal Recollections of John M. Palmer* (Cincinnati, 1901), 9; Schaper, *loc. cit.*, 393.

<sup>2</sup> J. S. Bassett, *Slavery in the State of North Carolina*, Johns Hopkins University Studies, XVII. 324, 399.



what less than half her population, had steadily advanced from the coast and the Savannah River toward the cotton lands of the interior, pushing before them the less prosperous farmers, who found new homes to the north or south of the cotton belt or migrated to the southwestern frontier.<sup>1</sup> Here, as in North Carolina, the planters in the interior of the state frequently followed the plow or encouraged their slaves by wielding the hoe.<sup>2</sup>

Thus this process of economic transformation passed from the coast toward the mountain barrier, gradually eliminating the inharmonious elements and steadily tending to produce a solidarity of interests. The South as a whole was becoming, for the first time since colonial days, a staple-producing region; and, as diversified farming declined, the region tended to become dependent for its supplies of meat products, horses, and mules, and even of hay and cereals, upon the North and West.

The westward migration of its people checked the growth of the South. It was colonizing the new West at the same time that the Middle Region was rapidly growing in population; and the result was that the proud states of the southern seaboard were reduced to numerical inferiority. Like New England, the South was an almost stationary section. From 1820 to 1830 the states of this group gained little more than half a million souls, hardly more than the increase of the single state of New York. Virginia, with a population of over a million, increased but 13.7 per cent., and the Carolinas only 15.5 per cent. In the next decade (1830-1840) these tendencies were even more clearly shown, for Virginia and the Carolinas then gained but little more than two per cent. Georgia alone showed rapid increase. At the beginning of the decade (1820-1830) the Indians still held all of the territory west of Macon, at the centre of the state, with the exception of two tiers of counties along the southern border; and when these lands were opened to settlement toward the close of the decade, they were occupied by a rush of settlement similar to the occupation of Oklahoma and Indian Territory in our own day. What Maine was to New England, that Georgia was to the southern seaboard, with the difference that it was deeply touched by influences more characteristically western. Because of the traits of her leaders and the rude aggressive policy of her people, Georgia belonged at least as much to the West as to the South. From colonial times the settlers in Georgia had been engaged in an almost

<sup>1</sup> Phillips, *loc. cit.*, 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

incessant struggle against the savages on her border, and they had the instincts of a frontier society.<sup>1</sup>

From 1800 to 1830 there were clear evidences of decline throughout the tide-water region. As the movement of capital and population toward the interior continued, wealth was drained from the coast; and as time went on, the competition of the fertile and low-priced lands of the Gulf Basin proved too strong for the outworn lands even of the interior of the South. Under the wasteful system of tobacco and cotton culture, without replenishment of the soil, the staple areas would in any case have declined in value. Even the corn- and wheatlands were exhausted by unscientific farming.<sup>2</sup> Writing in 1814 to Josiah Quincy,<sup>3</sup> John Randolph of Roanoke lamented the decline of the seaboard planters. He declared that the region was now sunk in obscurity; what enterprise or capital there was in the country had retired westward; deer and wild turkeys were not so plentiful anywhere in Kentucky as near the site of the ancient Virginia capital, Williamsburg. In the Virginia convention of 1829 Mr. Mercer estimated that in 1817 land values in Virginia aggregated two hundred and six million dollars, and negroes averaged three hundred dollars; while in 1829 the land values did not surpass ninety millions, and slaves had fallen in value to one hundred and fifty dollars. In a speech in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1832 Thomas Marshall<sup>4</sup> asserted that the whole agricultural product of Virginia did not exceed in value the exports of eighty or ninety years before, when it contained not one-sixth of the population. In his judgment, the greater proportion of the larger plantations, with from fifty to one hundred slaves, brought the proprietors into debt; and rarely did a plantation yield one and a half per cent. profit on the capital. So great had become the depression that Randolph prophesied that the time was coming when the masters would run away from the slaves and be advertised by them in the public papers.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Phillips, *loc. cit.*, 88; A. B. Longstreet, *Georgia Scenes* (New York, 1840); G. R. Gilmer, *Sketches of Some of the First Settlers of Upper Georgia* (New York, 1855); *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society*, VIII. 443 *et seq.*

<sup>2</sup> C. W. Gooch, "Prize Essay on Agriculture in Virginia", in *Lynchburg Virginian*, July 4, 1833; Martin, *Gazetteer of Virginia*, 99-100.

<sup>3</sup> Edmund Quincy, *Life of Josiah Quincy*, 353.

<sup>4</sup> *Proceedings of Virginia Convention, 1829-1830*, 178; Winfield H. Collins, *The Domestic Slave Trade of the Southern States* (New York, 1904), 26.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, cited from *Richmond Enquirer*, February 2, 1832; B. W. Arnold, *History of the Tobacco Industry in Virginia from 1860 to 1894*, Johns Hopkins University Studies, XV.

<sup>6</sup> Collins, *loc. cit.*, 26.

It was in this period that Thomas Jefferson fell into such financial embarrassments that he was obliged to request of the legislature of Virginia permission to dispose of property by lottery to pay his debts, and that a subscription was taken up to relieve his distress.<sup>1</sup> At the same time Madison, having vainly tried to get a loan from the United States Bank, was forced to dispose of some of his lands and stocks; and Monroe at the close of his term of office found himself financially ruined. He gave up Oak Hill, and spent his declining years with his son-in-law in New York City.<sup>2</sup> The old-time tide-water mansions, where in an earlier day everybody kept open house, gradually fell into decay.

Sad indeed was the spectacle of Virginia's ancient aristocracy. It had never been a luxurious society. The very wealthy planters, with vast cultivated estates and pretentious homes, were very few. For the most part, the houses were moderate structures, set at intervals of a mile or so apart, often in park-like grounds, with long avenues of trees. The plantation was a little world in itself. Here was made much of the clothing for the slaves, and the mistress of the plantation supervised the spinning and weaving. Leather was tanned on the place; and blacksmithing, wood-working, and other industries were carried on, often under the direction of white mechanics. The planter and his wife commonly had the care of the black families which they owned, looked after them when they were sick, saw to their daily rations, arranged marriages, and determined the daily tasks of the plantation. The abundant hospitality between neighbors gave opportunity for social cultivation, and politics was a favorite subject of conversation.

The leading planters served as justices of the peace, but they were not dependent for their selection upon the popular vote. Appointed by the governor on nomination of the court itself, they constituted a kind of close corporation, exercising local judicial, legislative, and executive functions. The sheriff was appointed by the governor from three justices of the peace recommended by the court, and the court itself appointed the county clerk. Thus the county government of Virginia was distinctly aristocratic. County-court day served as an opportunity for bringing together the freeholders, who included, not only the larger planters, but the small farmers and the poor whites—hangers-on of the greater plantations. Almost no large cities were found in Virginia. The court-house was hardly more than a meeting-place for the rural population. Here farmers

<sup>1</sup> H. S. Randall, *Life of Jefferson*, III. 527, 561.

<sup>2</sup> Gaillard Hunt, *Life of Madison*, 380.

exchanged their goods, traded horses, often fought, and listened to the stump speeches of the orators.<sup>1</sup>

Such were, in the main, the characteristics of that homespun plantation aristocracy which, through the Virginia dynasty, had ruled the nation in the days of Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Monroe. As their lands declined in value, they naturally sought for an explanation and a remedy.<sup>2</sup> The explanation was found most commonly in the charge that the protective tariff was destroying the prosperity of the South; and in reaction they turned to demand the old days of Jeffersonian rural simplicity under the guardianship of state rights and a strict construction of the Constitution. Madison in vain laid the fall in land values in Virginia to the uncertainty and low prices of the crops and to the attractions of the cheaper and better lands beyond the mountains.<sup>3</sup>

Others emphasized the fact that the semiannual migration toward the west and southwest swept off enterprising portions of the people and much of the capital and movable property of the state, and kept down the price of land by the great quantities which the movers threw into the market. Instead of applying a system of scientific farming and replenishment of the soil, there was a tendency for the planters who remained to get into debt in order to add to their possessions the farms offered for sale by the movers. Thus there was a flow of money toward the west to pay for these new purchases. The overgrown plantations soon began to look tattered and almost desolate. "Galled and gullied hillsides and sedgey, briery fields"<sup>4</sup> showed themselves in every direction. Finally the planter found himself obliged to part with some of his slaves in response to the demand from the new cotton-fields, or to migrate himself, with his caravan of negroes, to open a new home in the Gulf Region. During the period of this survey, the price for prime field-hands in Georgia averaged a little over seven hundred dollars.<sup>5</sup> If the estimate of one hundred and fifty dollars for negroes sold in family lots in Virginia is correct, it is clear that economic law would bring about a condition where Virginia's resources would in part depend upon her supply of slaves to the cotton belt.<sup>6</sup> It is clear also that the Old Dominion had passed the apogee of her political power.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney* (Richmond, 1903), 14-24; Susan D. Smedes, *Memorials of a Southern Planter* (Baltimore, 1887), 34-37.

<sup>2</sup> Randall, *Jefferson*, III. 532.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters and Other Writings of Madison*, III. 614.

<sup>4</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, July 4, 1833.

<sup>5</sup> Phillips, in *Political Science Quarterly*, XX. 267.

<sup>6</sup> Collins, *Domestic Slave Trade*, 42-46.



It was not only the planters of Virginia that suffered in this period of change. As the more extensive and fertile cotton-fields of the new states of the Southwest opened, North Carolina, and even South Carolina, found themselves embarrassed. With the fall in cotton prices, already mentioned, it became increasingly necessary to possess the advantages of large estates and unexhausted soils, in order to extract a profit from this cultivation. From South Carolina there came a protest more vehement and aggressive than that of the discontented classes of Virginia. Already the indigo plantation had ceased to be profitable, and the rice-planters no longer held their old prosperity.

Charleston was peculiarly suited to lead in a movement of revolt. It was the one important centre of real city life of the seaboard south of Baltimore. Here every February the planters gathered from their plantations, thirty to one hundred and fifty miles away, for a month in their town houses. At this season races, social gaieties, and political conferences vied with each other in engaging their attention. Returning to their plantations in the early spring, they remained until June, when considerations of health compelled them either again to return to the city, to visit the mountains, or to go to such watering-places as Saratoga, in New York. Here again they talked politics and mingled with political leaders of the North. It was not until fall that they were able to return again to their estates.<sup>1</sup> Thus South Carolina, affording a combination of plantation life with the social intercourse of the city, gave peculiar opportunities for exchanging ideas and consolidating the settlement of her leaders.

The condition of South Carolina was doubtless exaggerated by Hayne of South Carolina in his speech in the Senate in 1832, when he characterized it as "not merely one of unexampled depression, but of great and all-pervading distress", with "the mournful evidence of premature decay", "merchants bankrupt or driven away—their capital sunk or transferred to other pursuits—our shipyards broken up—our ships all sold!" "If", said he, "we fly from the city to the country, what do we there behold? Fields abandoned; the hospitable mansions of our fathers deserted; agriculture drooping; our slaves, like their masters, working harder, and faring worse; the planter striving with unavailing efforts to avert the ruin which is before him." He drew a sad picture of the "once thriving planter reduced to despair, . . . gathering up the small remnants of his broken fortune, and, with his wife and his little ones, tearing himself from the scenes of his childhood, and the bones of his ancestors,

<sup>1</sup> A. Hodgson, *Letters from North America* (London, 1824), I. 50.



to seek, in the wilderness, that reward for his industry, of which" the policy of Congress had deprived him.<sup>1</sup>

The genius of the South expressed itself most clearly in the field of politics. If the democratic Middle Region could show a multitude of clever politicians, the aristocratic South possessed an abundance of leaders bold in political initiative and masterful in their ability to use the talents of their Northern allies. When the Missouri question was debated, John Quincy Adams remarked "that if institutions are to be judged by their results in the composition of the councils of this Union, the slave-holders are much more ably represented than the simple freemen".<sup>2</sup>

The Southern statesmen fall into two classes. On the one side was the Virginia group, now for the most part old men, rich in the honors of the nation, still influential through their advice, but no longer directing party policy. Jefferson and Madison were in retirement in their old age; Marshall as chief justice was continuing his career as the expounder of the Constitution in accordance with Federalist ideals. John Randolph, his old eccentricities increased by disease and intemperance, remained to proclaim the extreme doctrines of Southern dissent and to impale his adversaries with javelins of flashing wit. A maker of phrases which stung and festered, he was capable of influencing public opinion somewhat in the same way as are the cartoonists of modern times. But "his course through life had been like that of the arrow which Alcestes shot to heaven, which effected nothing useful, though it left a long stream of light behind it."<sup>3</sup> In North Carolina, the venerable Macon remained to protest like a later Cato against the tendencies of the times, and to raise a warning voice to his fellow-slaveholders against national consolidation.

But in the course of this decade the effective leadership of the South fell to Calhoun of South Carolina and Crawford of Georgia. Calhoun came from that Scotch-Irish Presbyterian stock that occupied the uplands of the South in the middle of the eighteenth century. The family lived on the Indian-fighting frontier of the Carolinas, whence Boone, Robertson, and Andrew Jackson crossed the mountains to Kentucky and Tennessee. Remaining behind, the Calhouns underwent the transformation of their section. At the close of the War of 1812 John C. Calhoun was the rival of Henry Clay in the championship of nationalistic legislation; the antagonist of a "low,

<sup>1</sup> *Register of Debates*, VIII., part 1. 80-81; cf. David F. Houston, *A Critical Study of Nullification in South Carolina* (Harvard Historical Studies, vol. 3, 1896), 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs*, IV. 506.

<sup>3</sup> *Lynchburg Virginian*, May 9, 1833.

sordid, selfish, and sectional spirit"; the painter of the vision of a great organic nation, every part responsive to the other, sacrificing local interests for the good of the whole.<sup>1</sup> In those days of his fascinating and ardent young manhood<sup>2</sup> he impressed his hearers as an extremist, a man with a tendency to rash speculation and novelty. This philosophical trait of his mind was inherent, not a development of his later sectional attitude. To whatever cause he supported he brought the tendency to draw the last logical deduction; to set boldly forth the complete conclusions. Senator Mills of Massachusetts characterized him about 1823 in these words:<sup>3</sup>

He is ardent, persevering, industrious, and temperate, of great activity and quickness of perception, and rapidity of utterance; as a politician, too theorizing, speculative, and metaphysical,—magnificent in his views of the powers and capacities of the government, and of the virtue, intelligence, and wisdom of the *people*. He is in favor of elevating, cherishing, and increasing all the institutions of the government, and of a vigorous and energetic administration of it. From his rapidity of thought, he is often wrong in his conclusions, and his theories are sometimes wild, extravagant, and impractical. He has always claimed to be, and is, of the Democratic party, but of a very different class from that of Crawford; more like Adams, and his schemes are sometimes denounced by his party as ultra-fanatical.

Another, writing of the same early period of Calhoun's career, declared:

He wants, I think, consistency and perseverance of mind, and seems incapable of long continued and patient investigation. What he does not see at the first examination, he seldom takes pains to search for; but still the lightning glance of his mind, and the rapidity with which he analyzes, never fail to furnish him with all that may be necessary for his immediate purposes. In his legislative career, which, though short, was uncommonly luminous, his love of novelty, and his apparent solicitude to astonish were so great, that he has occasionally been known to go beyond even the dreams of political visionaries, and to propose schemes which were in their nature impracticable or injurious, and which he seemed to offer merely for the purpose of displaying the affluence of his mind, and the fertility of his ingenuity.

William Wirt said in 1824:<sup>5</sup>

Calhoun advised me the other day to study less and trust more to genius; and I believe the advice is sound. He has certainly practised on

<sup>1</sup> Speech on the Bonus Bill, *Annals of Congress*, 14 Cong., 2 Sess., 853-855.

<sup>2</sup> A. Hodgson, *Letters from North America*, I. 80; *Atlantic Monthly*, XXVI. 337-338.

<sup>3</sup> *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* (1881-1882), XIX. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted by A. Hodgson, *Letters from North America*, I. 81. These letters were published as early as 1824.

<sup>5</sup> John P. Kennedy, *Memoirs of the Life of William Wirt* (Philadelphia, 1849), II. 164; cf. Adams, *Memoirs*, V. 361.

his own precepts and has become, justly, a distinguished man. It may do very well in politics, where a proposition has only to be compared with general principles with which the politician is familiar.

Played upon by the forces of economic change within his section, Calhoun toward the end of the decade reluctantly yielded to the sectional interests of South Carolina, and in 1828 he framed, in the South Carolina Exposition, the first classical statement of the defense of the section against the nation, fashioning the fragments of state-sovereignty doctrine into the nullification argument, and finding in the domestic experience of South Carolina herself the historical basis for his theory of the defense of a minority area against the majority.<sup>1</sup> But even in 1828 he refrained from making public either his authorship of the Exposition or his adherence to nullification.

Crawford also reflected, though in a different way, the processes of sectional change which passed over the South. A Georgian, of Virginia birth, he was an astute, moderate, skilful politician. Unpolished and even coarse in his manners, he had a strong, vigorous mind, and power over men, and a capacity for making combinations and organizing a following. In his earlier career he had incurred the charge of Federalism, upheld the doctrine of implied powers, and denied the right of the state to resist the laws of Congress, except by changing its representation, or by appealing to the sword under the right of revolution. He almost won the nomination for the presidency against Monroe in 1816, and while a member of Monroe's cabinet he incurred the charge of intrigue against the administration, and of building up a personal following by the use of patronage. How much of this charge was due to the envy and jealousy of his rivals (from whom the estimates of his character must principally be drawn) need not here be decided. The important fact is that around the Georgian gathered friends of state sovereignty and the slaveholding interest. Little by little he found himself, with all his love of moderation and his expediency, forced by the tendency of his state to take a sectional position, and in consequence to lose an important part of his following as a national statesman. The Georgians, less speculative than the South-Carolinians, were fully as firm in their determination to secure the legislation essential for the interests of their state and for the cotton area. These forces drove him from his policy of temporizing on the tariff and internal improvements.

The lesser leaders of his state (like Cobb, Forsyth, and Troup) deprived him—as the lesser leaders of South Carolina (Hayne,

<sup>1</sup> Calhoun, *Works* (ed. R. K. Crallé, 1851), I. 402-405.

Hamilton, McDuffie, William Smith, Turnbull, and the rest) deprived Calhoun—of the opportunity to hold a national following, and pushed the two greater statesmen on in a sectional road which their own caution and personal ambitions made them reluctant to tread.

Nor must it be forgotten that early in the decade the South lost two of her ablest political leaders, the wise and moderate Lowndes of South Carolina, and William Pinkney, the brilliant Maryland orator.

Thus in these ten years the influence of economic change within this section transformed the South-Carolinians from warm supporters of a liberal national policy into the straitest of the sect of state-sovereignty advocates, intent upon raising barriers against the flood of nationalism that threatened to overwhelm the South. Virginia, divided by internal dissensions between the interior and the older counties and suffering from the decline of her economic power, saw the sceptre pass to the cotton-raising states, which gave to her doctrines of state sovereignty a new and drastic utterance, and made of them no academic theory, but a plan of action.

No better illustration of the influence of economic interests upon political ideas can be found than in the history of cotton culture and slavery in these important years. The price of cotton fell as production increased. In 1816 the average price of middling uplands in New York was thirty cents, and South Carolina's leaders favored the tariff; in 1820 it was seventeen cents, and the South saw in the protective system, a grievance; in 1824 it was fourteen and three-quarters cents, and the South-Carolinians denounced the tariff as unconstitutional; when the woollens bill was agitated in 1827, cotton had fallen to but little more than nine cents, and the radicals of the section threatened civil war. Then it was that Calhoun gave his casting vote against the tariff of 1827, and strove to tide over the storm by the device of nullification. Sectional economic interests had dominated the political philosophy of the greatest Southern statesman since Jefferson, and the South had entered on the long struggle that culminated in the Civil War.

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